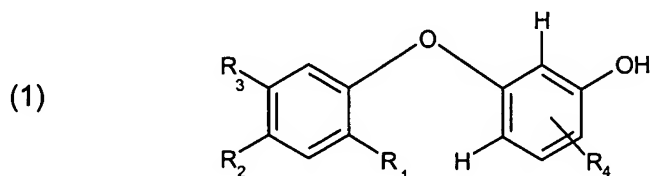


1-21 (cancelled).

22. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method, which comprises contacting a substrate with an antimicrobially effective amount of a hydroxydiphenyl ether compound of the formula



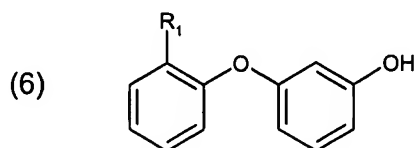
wherein,

R₂ is hydrogen, C₁-C₂₀alkyl, hydroxy substituted C₁-C₂₀alkyl or C₁-C₆alkylcarbonyl;

R₁ and R₃ are independently of each other hydrogen or C₁-C₂₀alkyl; and

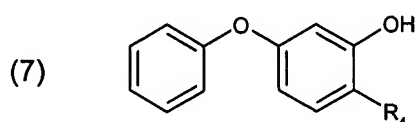
R₄ is hydrogen, C₃-C₅alkyl, hydroxy substituted C₁-C₂₀alkyl, C₁-C₆alkylcarbonyl or C₅-C₇cycloalkyl, with the proviso that when R₄ is hydrogen, R₁ is C₃-C₄ alkyl and R₃ is hydrogen.

23. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula



wherein R₁ is C₃-C₄alkyl is employed.

24. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula



wherein R₄ is C₃-C₅alkyl is employed.

25.(previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22 which is carried out during finishing of undyed and dyed or printed fibre materials.

26. (previously presented): A method according to claim 22 for the antimicrobial treatment of skin, mucous membranes or hair which comprises applying an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22 thereto.
27. (previously presented): A method of use of a compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 which comprises the incorporation of an antimicrobially effective amount of said compound into polymeric materials or the antimicrobial finishing of said polymeric materials with an antimicrobially effective amount of said compound as defined in claim 22.
28. (previously presented): A method according to claim 22 for the antimicrobial treatment of a hard surface which comprises applying to the hard surface an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22.
29. (previously presented): A method for the antimicrobial treatment of teeth and gums which comprises applying an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22 thereto.
30. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a personal care composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a cosmetically tolerable carrier or auxiliary is employed.
31. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein an oral care composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a carrier or auxiliary is employed.
32. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a detergent composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a carrier or auxiliary is employed.
- 33-36. (cancelled).